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Jorge (left) and Manny Hernandez are co-owners and founders of Miami-based Solo Printing.

Duo Take Solo Flight to the Top

Manny and Jorge Hernandez shared a vision for a company built around exemplary customer service and teamwork. Now, 25 years later, Solo Printing is soaring to new heights by fulfilling clients' desire for high-quality, fast-turn web and sheetfed offerings.

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APRIL 2009 PRINTING IMPRESSIONS OFFSET ADVANCEMENTS CONTINUOUS-FEED DIGITAL PROCESSING LEAN MANUFACTURING

Vision Leads To Success

BY ERIK CAGLE
Senior Editor

THE WORLD is full of people who grouse about the company they work for, bemoaning the manner in which operations are conducted, and placated by the notion that if *they* were in charge, things would be done differently. That way, things would be done the right way.

The world contains more grouse-ers than entrepreneurs. And that's simply because few people have the gumption, the nerve, the chutzpah, to step out from their comfort zone and take a chance in life. It's much easier to gripe—and a lot safer—than to stick your neck out.

Manny and Jorge Hernandez, who began their respective careers working for other printing companies, could have chosen the grouser tact. But these brothers didn't just want to be in charge. They had a vision of what they considered the ideal printing company, and now they can stake claim to being co-owners of one of South Florida's finest.

"Why work for somebody else?" Manny Hernandez phi-

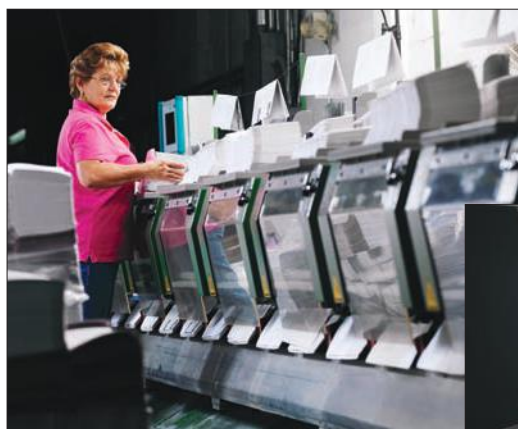
losophizes. "We said to ourselves, let's just go ahead and do it. We saw what was being done wrong at other print shops, and we didn't want to make those same mistakes with our company. We were both very young, so we put our energy and our own way of thinking into the business."

Their own way of thinking forged the identity of Solo Printing, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. In that short span of time, the company has grown to a \$20 million annual performer with 100 employees, providing web and

sheetfed offset printing for retail, travel and communications customers. The Miami-based business also provides testing materials for the education sector.

From Humble Beginnings

The company started out producing letterhead, stationery and flyers in a 1,400-square-foot warehouse, but now cranks out brochures, catalogs and publications—along with a full range of general commercial printing products—in a 100,000-square-foot facility. While operating in a segment and marketplace that are fraught with overcapacity and intense competition, Solo Printing has managed to make its slice of South Florida even hotter with a staple of business success.



Clockwise, from the top: An employee loads the pockets of Solo's Muller Martini Bravo-T saddlestitcher. Right, work from the Fuji Sumo platesetter is inspected. Below, the pride and joy at Solo Printing is its new Komori System 38S heatset web press.



The executive team at Solo Printing, shown from the left (front row): Manny Hernandez, John Carr, Miguel Delrivero, Andy Sanchez, Luis Leal and Robert Hernandez. Back row: Joe Cespedes, Herman Rea, Jorge Hernandez, Eric Hernandez and Jorge Hernandez Jr.

"Every single industry in America falls short when it comes to customer service," notes Jorge Hernandez. "We can't lose sight that our customers put the bread on your table. Since day one, we've worked hard to provide exceptional customer service and to provide a personal touch.

"There's no answering machine when you call our company that says dial for this, dial for that. No way. We have a real person answer your call and take care of your problems. You need to make customer service Number One to be successful in any industry."

Of course, it helps to have some firepower in the pressroom to back up that friendly service and promised delivery dates. Solo Printing has addressed its technological needs with the addition of a six-color, 38" Komori System 38S heatset web press equipped with in-line aqueous coating, remoist glue, pattern perforator, combination folder and a Vits sheeter.

The 38S enables Solo to provide clients with quick turnarounds on both long and short runs, while not sacrificing print quality. The web press also acts as a quasi-sheetfed machine, churning out what has traditionally been viewed by many printers as sheetfed work. That capability is due, in large part, to the fast makereadies provided by the press' fully automatic plate-changing (APC) system that allows complete plate changeovers in two minutes, as well as its KHS-AI interface system.

The press, which went live last August, has provided Solo Printing with a point of differentiation among its competitors, according to Manny Hernandez. "Customers are amazed by the quality on our Komori web...the cleanness of the dot," he says. "We had one publication client who switched to us from another printer and, when they compared the reproduction of the advertisements from one issue to the next, they couldn't believe the difference.

"The turn times we're offering customers is unheard of; we can

(Continued on page 22)

Solo Printing*(Continued from page 20)*

do setups very quickly, and with minimal waste," he adds. "It makes us very efficient and price-competitive."

Solo Printing is currently running two shifts, five days a week on the System 38S, and Jorge Hernandez

says the ultimate goal is to eventually run three shifts, 24/7. The growth the new web press installation has provided is unparalleled, he adds, and, despite the economy, high expectations are in line for 2009.

The company obtained its first 40" Komori sheetfed model in 1995. Today, Solo also operates an older five-color, 36" King heatset web with a

Vits sheeter; a six-color, 40" Akiyama sheetfed press with aqueous coater; as well as an eight-color, 40" Heidelberg Speedmaster 102 sheetfed perfecter, the latter of which it touts as one of the only sheetfed presses of its ilk in South Florida.

Solo Printing has returned perfect binding to its menu of capabilities with the acquisition of a new



Kitting and fulfillment services are vital aspects of the value-added product and service portfolio at Solo Printing.

Kolbus KM 600, which was slated to be installed and operational by the end of March. Solo had been outsourcing its perfect binding work ever since taking out an older binder several years ago.

"We were farming out our perfect binding work for the past two years, and it was getting out of control," Jorge Hernandez notes. "By bringing it back in-house, we can control the quality and gain more efficiencies. It will also make it very convenient for us and our clients."

Not Afraid to Invest

Solo Printing was quite active on the new equipment front in 2008. Other improvements/enhancements it made last year include a second automatic platesetter, a Fuji Sumo, along with another 45" Polar cutter. In the next year or two, the Hernandez brothers would like to land another Komori press to replace its older web unit.

Corporate responsibility also rings true with the Hernandez brothers, and not because it is the cause du jour. The company has earned chain-of-custody certification from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

"We've got to protect the environment and plan for the future, for the sake of our children and our grandkids," Manny Hernandez relates. "Plus, a lot of our clients are Fortune 500 companies that want to print on certified paper."

A sound of knocking wood can be heard at Solo Printing, perhaps to ward off superstitions—for the company has remained largely unscathed by the economic downturn of the past year. They're projecting a remarkable growth rate of 20 percent for 2009. The figure would be closer to 25 or 30 percent with a more robust economy.

"At the end of the day, it's all about teamwork," Manny Hernandez says. "Our dedicated employees have enabled us to differentiate ourselves from the competition. We have one of the best groups of people in the industry."

Having a vision helps, as well. **PI**

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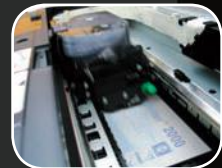
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